

Tape 17, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen. The date is January 15, 1993, and this is Tape 17, Side 1.

I noticed in the news over the weekend that there were a number of things regarding Republicans, particularly in regards to Oregon. You're going - later this week you're going to an Oregon Republican party meeting?

VA National meeting. Actually, we're going down to St. Louis, Missouri, and the national committee is going to select a new chairman. This is the first time they have genuinely selected a new chairman - well, let's see. I guess now it would be, what, twelve years? At least that. When I say that, when you have a sitting president, the president says, I want this person for chair, and that's who you go with. It got a little perverted when you're in charge. By that, I mean the White House. Then it gets tremendously balanced. The national committee has to do things, all of which benefit the incumbent president of your party so they get reelected. And that's not really the way you build parties. You don't build them from the top down, you really build them from the bottom up. Well anyway, they're kind of excited about the chance to really pick a chairman, and there are five candidates, including Craig Berkman, here, from Oregon, John Ashcroft, Haley Barbur ~~isn't~~, Bo Callaway ~~isn't~~, Spencer Abraham. And they're campaigning. Gee whiz, they're campaigning. Bo Callaway came here to meet with me, Haley Barbur came here to meet with me. I've got a file of papers that must be two inches thick of mail coming in, and I support, and this is why you ought to vote for - I'm laughing because I'm telling everybody I'm uncommitted. I guess I hail back to my first

convention in 1968. I think I mentioned that in those days it was a winner-take-all. Whoever won our primary gets all of our votes for the nominee for president of the United States. Nixon was the one that won, and so we go back to Miami Beach committed to Richard Nixon. Well, nobody wooed us. I mean, we didn't get invited to any parties, we - I mean, the delegations that were uncommitted, they got all kinds of attention. So I suppose I'm hailing back to that time. I'm remaining uncommitted, so I'm getting wooed, and that's all right.

CH Well, what is your relationship, and how do you feel about Craig Berkman having been head of the Oregon Republican party?

VA Oh, I think Craig would make a reasonably good chairman, and I'm going to be one of those that make sure he gets on the list, and I'll make a short nominating speech for him, which I agreed to do. I think we might have some stronger candidates than Craig, but I think loyalty to him, I think I should be doing that. I don't think it'll go on the first ballot, in any event. I don't think any of the candidates have enough to win, so there will certainly be I don't know how many ballots, but it's going to go beyond one ballot, and I'll see that Craig gets a shot at doing this and putting it together.

CH He's one of five candidates?

VA He's one of five, yeah.

CH And how has your relationship been with him over the years?

VA Oh, fine. As a matter of fact, I asked him to be chair and then engineered his election two years ago, in the sense of asking T. J. Bailey to not run, or resign - we had a good chat;

of the STATE ROBBERY party

this was all amicable - and, then, finding a candidate that was acceptable and making sure it all went rather smoothly.

CH Why was it that you had asked T. J. Bailey not to...?

VA Well, I think he was at a point, really, where he could see what I told him. I said, "T. J., you know, you're chairman of the party, but you're really chairman of nothing," because nobody was supporting the party, nobody was giving any money to the party, nobody was paying any attention to the party. That's really where they were, and he knew that and understood it. There was no future in what he was doing, and he realized that. So, then, it was a matter of coming up with an acceptable candidate that both the moderates and liberals and conservatives could support. The conservatives became disenchanted right near the end ^{of his term} and were really sniping at him, and I don't think he would have won had he tried a run for reelection.

CH Bailey or Berkman?

VA Craig Berkman, this last time.

CH Because of the issues surrounding...?

VA Well, there were a whole lot of reasons, and they were kind of put out; they, meaning the ultra-conservatives. But he raised a lot of money, a lot of money, and did a good job, I thought.

CH I also noticed that Senator Packwood is in the news for his trip coming back to Oregon, and, of course, he's been criticized for not having more open meetings with the public. How do you feel about that?

VA Well, I think he should have been more in evidence. However, I can understand why he has a reluctance to do so. Now, it isn't necessarily reluctance to face the fact that there was these accusations, and, as even his statement indicated, the possibility that indeed they were true. I was interviewed a couple of times, one by, oh, some - not too long ago by the Washington Post, I think it was, and, then, most recently by Jeff Mapes in the Oregonian, and I said that his position of not discussing the allegations specifically and the questions that did - Did you do that to Mary? and Did you try to impugn her morals? or whatever. I said, That's not an appropriate forum, but that's what you want to know, that's what you want to ask, and, you know, if he comes and faces you, you're going to have to start asking these questions. And I said, The forum is not right, because the accuser is not there, so all you have is one side of it. It should better be in the atmosphere of ethics or rules in the Congress where both parties are present, and this shouldn't be dealt with in the media. Now, they don't particularly like that because that's not news. I mean - well, it will be news when it gets back there, but they want the news right now. And so he knows that that's what they're going to do, and I can understand. You know, that would get a little vexing.

CH Of course, the ethics committee is - or rules or whatever they appear before, would also be under the media scrutiny. Is there any chance that something like that could be closed when they're dealing with sensitive...

VA The ethics committee?

CH ...matters like that?

VA I don't know how sensitive you can get and have it public.

The Anita Hill, that was pretty public and quite explicit. So I don't think - from everything that I've heard thus far in terms of accusation, it doesn't go quite as far as Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill, from everything I understand. Yeah, you know, they're going to attack the credibility of the ethics committee or the rules committee and the members on it, and this is a bad part about society, prejudging. It's the same thing where, you know, we pick a Supreme Court judge: Are you going to be for or against abortion. A shameful way of picking Supreme Court judges. Supreme Court judges are going to deal with public safety, they're going to deal with civil rights of all kinds, all kinds of things, not just abortion. To prejudge what a judge will do - I think it's appropriate to say, you know, What's your position on abortion? I think it's appropriate to say, I don't really think I should make that known. I'm a judge. I'm going to listen to the facts, and I'll make my decision based on the facts. You're asking me to make a prejudgment before the case is even presented. I'm going to vote for or against it. That's not appropriate. That, however, is not the way society is. I'm just giving you - in the best of all worlds, that's the way it ought to be. So, back to Packwood for a moment, I don't think the right forum is dealing with these cases via the media.

CH Well, going back to your 1974 run for governor, where we had stopped, we were talking about some of the quotes in the Oregonian and other papers about your defeating Clay Myers, and you had mentioned that there was - you were being labeled as a conservative, that you had some concern about the way you were being stereotyped.

VA First of all, it was a shock, in the sense that I had never been labeled, nor had I thought about a label. Well, somebody told me that I was known as a liberal Republican when I went over

to the senate, but that was pretty light stuff, and I didn't really - I didn't stop to analyze it at all. But when the article in the Oregonian the next morning said, Vic Atiyeh, the conservative, beat the moderate, Clay Myers, that really kind of hit home. Wait a minute, you know. What do they mean, conservative. As a matter of fact, even today it's very hard for me to determine. I think the words conservative and liberal are fairly deceptive terms. Moderate is kind of explainable; that's sort of in the middle. But what makes a liberal and what makes a conservative, I don't even know today. Well, I know what ultras are. Ultraconservative and ultraliberal, that's fairly distinguishable, I think, in most everybody's mind. But what is generally a conservative and generally a liberal, I don't know. I have no idea what that means. Over the years, I say - I'm trying to analyze, who am I. I don't know if it really makes any difference, but to me it might make a difference, and I suppose, if I were to finally come down, that I would be a fiscal conservative, but in some of the things that I deal with, probably a liberal.

CH Did you feel that there was a negative stigma attached to the conservative label?

VA I thought it was politically negative in terms of an election. Without any great emotion, I don't consider myself a conservative; I really don't. But then, again, I'd say they're deceptive. I'm using my own measuring stick as to what they might be. I tell people that before the federal government got involved in daycare for welfare, before they did, I went to the Ways and Means Committee and recommended that the state of Oregon provide daycare for welfare. Now, I tell people that, and they're shocked. You, a conservative? they'd say. You did? Yes, I did. And, you know, it was a matter of understanding.

There are people who would like to get off of welfare, but how do they do that? Particularly the single parent. We'll get into that when I become governor, the single-parent family and all the rest. They have children; they have to take care of the children. They have that as a responsibility on their mind. How in the world can they go to school to learn and get trained or go look for a job and work? How can they do that when they have children? So I said to myself, The only way we can really get that job done, to get people off of welfare - and I always have believed that most people want to get off of welfare; they don't want to stay on - is that we have to help them, and the way you help them is with daycare. Now, that was - I don't recall what year that was, to be honest with you, but it was during a time when they didn't really pay much attention to me. They, meaning the Democrats and Republicans in the Ways and Means Committee. But I thought it was important enough for me to go down and propose that.

CH And this was in what year?

VA I don't recall. But I do know it was before the federal government got involved with it; before anybody got involved with daycare for welfare. And that was my motivation. Okay, what does that make me, conservative or liberal? Someone might say, Well, God, that's liberal. I told you earlier, when I had my first race they said, Now tell the people all the good things you've done. I said, I don't know what I've done. I didn't take an inventory. It's all on the tape. Then they came back and say, human resource is the thing I was mostly involved with. I hadn't thought about it. It's just who I am and how I feel and what I believe in.

CH Well, how do you think these labels are determined? What

kinds of things make someone feel that you are one way or another, or that anybody is one way or another?

VA Well, it's in the eyes of the beholder. If there is an ultraliberal looking at me, then I am a conservative. But I was talking with Haley Barbur, who was from down south, and he's talking about Republicans and how few of them were and how few even wanted to be identified as Republicans, and I chuckled and laughed and said, "Haley, you've got Democrats down there that up here would be called conservatives, but down there they're liberal Democrats." So it depends on who's looking at you. The newspaper writer looks at me, probably doesn't know much of what I actually have done, maybe have heard from somebody else, maybe had picked out some votes that I may have made on the fiscal conservative side, and all of a sudden decided I was a conservative. Anyway, I was puzzled. I said, Whoa, wait a minute. I'm not a conservative. Now, a conservative in the sense of what I'm - you know, I'm not telling you. But, you know, if you're a liberal and you look at me and say, Well, heck, first of all, he's a Republican, so he's got to be a conservative...

CH But that's not necessarily true, especially in Oregon where there are quite a few moderate and liberal Republicans.

VA That's right, absolutely. But they don't seem to pay attention to any of that stuff. I'm going to jump ahead now again - it's very hard to keep from doing it - but I had more women in my administration. I did an outstanding job in terms of appointing and seeing that we had minorities of all kinds, but when I ran in 1982, the Women's Caucus went against me. I don't understand it, you know, if they really look at what you're doing. I appointed the first woman chief of staff in Oregon's

history, I appointed the first woman supreme court judge. Now, Democrats would get points for that immediately. Somebody said to me one time, Have you ever been discriminated against? because of my Arabic background. No, I said, no - well, yes, I have been discriminated against. And they'd look at me. I've been discriminated against because I'm a Republican. And that's a fact. Can you imagine what terrible turmoil the AFL-CIO has to go through to endorse a Republican [laughter].

CH I know that you've supported a lot of positions that labor endorses and, yet, you never got the support of the AFL-CIO.

VA No, no, no. So now we're kind of getting into an arena in which people get pegged. Let me jump to Quayle for a moment. That poor guy really did get - he just got abused something terrible. Now, I have to tell you quickly, if I were going to be choosing a vice president, he would be down on any list I would have. But in terms of who he was and what he did and how he did it, I think he was unfairly treated. They came up with an image of Dan Quayle. I can recall - I didn't hear it directly, but I heard about it - when he came into town, I guess early on, and he met with the editorial board of the Oregonian. Now, the report I got back was that they thought he did a great job, but that never leaked out. So the guy was smarter and brighter. Still, if I were making the choice, I wouldn't have made the choice of Dan Quayle, but that doesn't mean that the guy was - he really was getting a bum rap, but those things happen. Gerry Ford, a great president, a great president, in my mind one of the great presidents on our history. I don't think he'll ever go down that way, but in my mind. What he did after Nixon resigned and he became president and he pardoned Nixon, and all of that stuff, the turmoil the country was in, what he did in two and a half years was incredible. Healing, he wrote the book A Time to Heal,

a great book, and I believe he - what do people remember? He stumbles. Now, wait a minute.

CH Well, bringing that a little bit closer to home, isn't that one of the things that people remember Bob Straub on, that he stuttered and stammered when he was speaking?

VA Well, you really have to admire him, because he had a problem with stuttering, and he really worked his way out of that. If you didn't know that, you wouldn't - you couldn't tell by his appearances, so you have to admire him for that. There are a lot of things about Bob Straub. Bob was a great guy, and I personally like him very much; I really do. As a human being, I think he's a great person. He didn't do well as a governor. Now, that's not being mean to him anymore than Governor Roberts. Governor Roberts is just not equipped to be a governor. Secretary of state; Bob Straub as state treasurer. Bob did a great job as state treasurer. But he made some mistakes, as did Governor Roberts. You pick people to be heads of agencies or advisers to you, and he didn't do a very good job. I kept saying, if his staff would ^{let} Bob be Bob, then my run against him the second time would have been a heck of a lot harder. But somehow he let them, and they wouldn't let him be Bob. Bob's a great guy.

CH What was it about being Bob that would be advantageous to his campaigns?

VA He quite a populist. He'd get around people, and he'd just be - there was no feeling of imperialism about him, which is what Oregonians, I think, like. The only imperial governor that I've seen is Neil Goldschmidt, and I couldn't understand why they allowed him to be so imperial. But Bob was just a nice guy, and

very friendly and very bright.

CH Going back to your comments about some of the Republican presidents, are there any Democratic presidents in modern times that you admire or feel were very good presidents?

VA Well, in terms of who I might have known - by that, I mean know their presence - was Franklin D., Harry Truman, JFK, LBJ, Jimmy Carter. Maybe Harry Truman, but Harry Truman was one of those people that was sort of born again. While he was president they didn't think an awful lot of him, nor did I. He was really down home. I read an article not too long ago - you know, he - talk about having your head screwed on right. When they were wooing him to be a vice president, they asked him several times, and he kept saying no, he didn't want to be vice president - I think it was in American Heritage - his comment was, All a vice president does is sit around and wait for a funeral. That was pretty succinct and probably true. Of course, the action of dropping the A bomb, the time he went against political theory and canned General MacArthur, you know, those things are pretty gutsy things to do. But he had this, The buck stops here, and he really meant it. So I suppose - and I didn't really know him, I never met him, nor did I meet LBJ or JFK or, of course, Franklin D., but just from everything - you know, if I were going to pick one out, then I suppose Harry Truman would be the one I'd pick out.

CH What about among Democratic governors in Oregon? Are there any that you particularly admire?

VA Well, I had to begin - well, I did know Bob Holmes, but I knew him after he was a governor. I liked Bob. I don't think he performed well as a governor, but I'm just going on, not what I

personally know, but what I've heard or listened to. But I knew him afterward, and I liked him very much. Then came the year of Republicans. There was Mark Hatfield for eight years and Tom McCall for eight years, and then Bob Straub, and then me for eight years, and then Neil Goldschmidt and Barbara Roberts, and so my answer would be no.

CH You didn't know Governor Holmes or...?

VA Not as a governor. I knew him afterward.

CH Well, going back to a couple of comments, here, on the election, they - they being the Oregonian - had a quote here about your campaign. It said, From the outset, the Atiyeh campaign had an inside verve among the Portland businessmen supporters. People who were inadvertently omitted from a calling list asked for tickets to a This-is-your-life fundraising dinner for Atiyeh at the Sheraton. Harry Bodine wrote that. Do you recall that?

VA [Laughing] No, I don't. It's strange.

CH Do you recall a This-is-your-life fundraising dinner?

VA No.

CH Where do they get this material?

VA Well, I'm sure it happened. The fact that I don't remember it doesn't mean it didn't happen. And again, you get down to labeling. You know, Atiyeh's going to get all this money from the fat cats, and poor old Bob is going to struggle along with patches on his coat and pants while Atiyeh goes through a

campaign with a tuxedo on.

CH Well, if you did have support - strong support from the Portland business community, why would that have been, figuring that Straub had very strong investment qualifications and had been a very good treasurer?

VA You recall I told you - you asked me why I ran, and I said the state was just dumped upside down, and there was just change after change after change, and Bob Straub was so closely identified with Tom McCall, and the two of them seemed to - Frick and Frack. They went along together pretty well, and he was just perceived to be another Tom McCall, and I think that they just didn't want anymore of that, meaning the business community. But it went beyond that, because when it finally washed out, I had a pretty strong vote in a really tough year for a Republican. So by and large, that's the way Oregonians were. But, then, I was a businessman, and there are darn few businessmen that ever run for office, really, when you look at it.

CH Well, did you see yesterday's paper? There was a full-page - actually, a two-page article about Tom McCall.

VA Yes, I read that.

CH I read it too. I was kind of amazed that here, almost twenty years after he left office, that he - that people remember him in almost a mythic way.

VA Yep.

CH Are you surprised by that?

VA No, I'm not. But he's fascinating. If you read it, they were factual in the article. They talked about Paul Hanneman coming up with the bottle bill; the fact that Tom McCall wasn't a supporter of it. But you recall I told you, you know, he'd see a good idea and grab on to it, and all of a sudden it's his. I've said many times, Tom McCall didn't stand there in the middle of the Willamette River and scoop it out by himself. And you recall we talked about the Interim Committee on Public Health that actually began this process, and the senate was the first one that an environment committee, the first one in the legislature to have one of those things, and we cranked it up, but nobody remembers that. They remember Tom McCall by himself scooping it up and keeping it clean. But you see, that's a genius of some kind.

CH But you think that at the time when he did leave office that people did not want another Tom McCall.

VA I think they were ready for a change, although they voted for Bob Straub, which didn't represent a great change, at least with the public image [inaudible]. And Bob also, when we talk about him, he really got trapped by the image of Tom McCall. You know, they'd say, Well, Tom McCall wouldn't do it that way, and they'd sort of want a perpetuation of Tom McCall through Bob Straub, and Bob Straub maybe sort of felt an obligation. When I was elected in '78 and they're starting doing the Tom McCall thing on me, I said, Whoa, wait a minute, guys. I'm not pretending to be Tom McCall, I'm not Tom McCall.

[End of Tape 17, Side 1]